



A Year of Living Sickishly: A Patient Reflects

Jessie C. Gruman

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On Friday afternoon of Labor Day weekend in 2010, my doctor called to tell me that the pathology report from a recent endoscopy showed that I had stomach cancer. Maybe you can imagine what happened next. At the time, I thought I could, since I had heard similar news three times before. But all my experience and all my expertise in health care did little to prepare me to meet the steep demands to find the right doctors and hospitals, choose the best treatments and then coordinate and participate fully in my care in the days following that phone call. Health care delivery is changing rapidly as technology advances and as health reform policies to reduce cost and improve quality and safety are implemented. But realizing the full potential of these changes rests on the often implicit assumption that we and our families knowledgeably and actively participate in our care. The essays collected here reflect on what it felt like as a patient with a serious illness to do this, to cobble together a plan with my clinicians that works and to slog through the treatments in the hope that my cancer will be contained or cured and that I will be able to resume the interesting life I love.

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